2005 DePauw Biennial

Contemporary Art in the Midwest
Much like the large, international-scaled biennials that have become ubiquitous vehicles for identifying and showcasing trends and particularities in contemporary art, the DePauw Biennial was initiated to bring attention to the innovative work of artists in a specific region – in this case, the three-state area of Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. Although its inaugural edition is more modest in scale and scope than its more comprehensive counterparts, its objective is the same: to legitimize the artists and work being produced in the region by inserting them into contemporary art discourse.

Many curators can confirm that taking on the task of organizing a regional biennial of contemporary art is a daunting one, particularly when you are a relative newcomer to the geographic area that you are focusing upon. My curatorial prerogative in organizing this exhibition was not to seek out work that expressed any sort of geographic style or sensibility; to the contrary, I was more interested in locating artists who create work that confirms their awareness of and participation in global contemporary art practice.

As the curator of the first DePauw Biennial, I felt it was crucial that the show was curated, rather than juried. Making direct contact with artists and their work, rather than relying on slides, resumes, reviews and artist statements, is a critical part of my own curatorial practice, as I feel that a more hands-on, experiential approach yields better results. My selection of artists was primarily driven by curatorial intuition and critical response. Mindful of the fact that the threat of provincialism is inherent to any regionally based biennial, a major goal was to avoid propagating or perpetuating a sub-genre of contemporary art – that is, a “Midwest style” — one that would suggest stylistic homogeneity or encourage a one-dimensional reading of work in the region.

Although I did not intend to organize a show that was thematically or formally driven, or one that functioned solely to identify trends that define the current artistic climate in the Midwest, certain formal and conceptual commonalities and connections did reveal themselves. The work in the show reflects a number of overlapping tendencies, such as diverse approaches to process, narrative, materiality, abstraction, conceptual strategies, technology, and place. This diversity extends to the wide range of materials, processes and media represented, including sound, web-based art, video, site-specific installation and performance, as well as painting, drawing, sculpture, photography and digital art.

Many of the artists invited to participate were selected because of their strong engagement with materiality and process. This is evidenced in work in which the artist’s hand is strongly present, a clear indicator of a preoccupation with and interest in craft. Painting and drawing are also well represented, particularly work in which mark-making and surface are a primary consideration. In addition, many of the artists exhibit a strong concern with materials, using them in ways that make us rethink the well-demarcated divisions often imposed upon various media. Conceptually-driven work is also strongly present, whether critical or laced with a strong sense of humor. And, despite my desire to deemphasize regionalism, several works allude to a sense of place, in ways that are both nuanced and overt.

The Richard E. Peeler Art Center at DePauw University is a fitting venue for a regional biennial of contemporary art. First, it is committed to organizing and hosting exhibitions that are challenging, provocative and relevant in regional, national and global contexts. In addition, the
I would like to thank the artists in the show for their generosity in opening their homes and studios to me. Making tough critical judgments is an inevitable part of curatorial practice. With this in mind, I would also like to acknowledge and thank the artists whose studios I visited, although they were not selected to participate in this incarnation of the DePauw Biennial. I would also like to thank my tireless and inspiring staff, Christopher Lynn and Christie Anderson, whose dedication and enthusiasm are invaluable. And, I would be remiss if I didn’t thank the following individuals, who graciously offered assistance in referring artists, sharing insights, and offering direction in the curatorial process: Barry Blinderman, Roy and Ann Boyd, Margo Crutchfield, Charles Desmarais, Matt Distel, Van Harrison, Rebecca Ibel, Paul Klein, Jacquie Mahan, Linda Schwartz, Ann Taulbee, and Tony Wight.
Exhibition Checklist
All works except where noted are collection of the artist.

Noelle Allen
Untitled (from Charts of Peripheral Isolates), 2004
graphite on mylar
12 x 24 inches

The Mortivores, 2004
graphite on mylar
28 x 42 inches

Feast and Courtship, 2004
graphite on mylar
30 x 42 inches

Jimmy Baker
Wind of Change, 2005
oil and resin on panel, latex on Sintra and Ohio River water
60 x 36 inches

White Heat, 2005
Huffy mountain bike and mixed media
36 x 58 x 26 inches

Conrad Bakker
Untitled Project: eBay/Postcards/Indiana, 2004
oil on wood panel
dimensions variable

Keith Benjamin
Get Rich, 2003
fooz ball table, paper bags, tape and cereal boxes
42 x 16 x 13 inches

Plenty II, 2003
newspaper pulp, cereal boxes and wood
8 x 16 x 13 inches

Plenty III, 2003
newspaper pulp, cereal boxes and wood
8 x 19 x 19 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Linda Schwartz
Gallery, Cincinnati

Denise Burge
The Mountain, 2003-2005
fabric, paint and mixed media
168 x 240 inches

Tammy Burke
Rescaled Mountain Range, 2004
fabric
120 x 7 inches

Sunrise I Wanted to Stop, 2004
fabric
125 x 16 inches

Jennifer Danos
Untitled (Debris 2), 2005
sculpy clay and mixed media
dimensions variable

Untitled (Poured Concrete 3), 2005
contact paper
dimensions variable

Untitled (Dead Bugs 1), 2005
sculpy clay and mixed media
dimensions variable

Untitled (Outlets 1), 2005
contact paper
dimensions variable

Carrie Dickason
Sprawl, 1996 – 2004
discarded plastic packaging and wire
dimensions variable

Katy Fischer
290, 2002
ballpoint pen on panel
12 x 16 inches

Sidewalk Crack 4, 2003
gouache and graphite on paper
22 x 30 inches

Sidewalk Crack 5, 2003
gouache and graphite on paper
22 x 30 inches

Warren Fry
First Viewing of ‘Lever’, 2003
Castilene, wood, acrylic and styrene
54 x 14 x 11 inches

Matthew Barney on ‘The Other Half’, 2004
Castilene, wood and acrylic paint
44-1/2 x 12 x 10 inches

Love Hours, 2004
epoxy, styrene, wood, flocking and stereo with audio CD
4 x 53 x 36 inches

Linda Gall
Skylab – Spring, 2004
watercolor on arches paper
22-1/4 x 30 inches

Skylab – Lava Mountains, 2004
watercolor on arches paper
22-1/4 x 30 inches

Courtesy of Rebecca Ibel Gallery,
Columbus, Ohio

Emily Kennerk
Supersuburbia, 2005
acrylic paint
dimensions variable

Portraits, 2001
Olan Mills portraits and props
dimensions variable

Chip Korthman
Untitled (HPF Micro-Project I), 2005
cement, yarn, plastic fork, Styrofoam plate, laptop computer, PowerPoint questionnaire, and custom-made artwork
dimensions variable

Anthony Luensman
Stairstorm, 2005
assorted electronics, EL wire, miniature motors, LEDs, subwoofer driver and plastic tub
dimensions variable

Lori Miles
Distaff, 2004
string and wood
84 x 20 x 20 inches

New Catalogue
Big Ten Co-Ed With Ski Mask No. 5, 2003
50 x 40 inches
digital C-print

Big Ten Co-Ed With Ski Mask No. 11, 2003
50 x 40 inches
digital C-print

Courtesy of Bodybuilder & Sportsman
Gallery, Chicago

Melissa Orosky
Fall, 2004
acrylic, oil and enamel on canvas
60 x 60 inches

Stream, 2003
acrylic, oil and enamel on canvas
48 x 60 inches

Brian Presnell
Wheelie, c. 2000-04
video

Oceanscape (Advantage Knight), 2004
found painting and mixed media
31 x 27 inches

Northern Europe (Advantage Wheelie), 2004
found painting and mixed media
26-3/8 x 30-3/8 inches

Rural Iowa (Advantage Wheelie), 2004
found painting and mixed media
24-3/4 x 28-3/4 inches

Scott Roberts
Devil Cat Renovation, 2005
mat board, wood, wallpaper and mixed media
42 x 60 x 60 inches

Jason Salavon
Emblem (Taxi Driver), 2004
digital C-print
48 x 48 inches

Courtesy of the artist and The Project,
New York and Los Angeles

Dana Sperry
First Person Shooter or The New Rider of the Apocalypse, 2004
video projection
dimensions variable

Steve Stelling
Green Chapter Variant, 2004
ink, acrylic and crayon on paper
36-1/2 x 46-3/4 inches

Mountain Room, 2004
ink, acrylic, crayon and marker on paper
49 x 36 inches

Jeremy Tubbs
Self-Defacing Action, 2004
pigmented wax on raised grid panel
132 x 84 inches

Heidt van Wieren
Rosy Posey II, 2003
Elmer’s glue/PVA and ink on panel
38 x 46 inches

Blush II, 2003
Elmer’s glue/PVA and ink on panel
42 x 36 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Roy Boyd
Gallery, Chicago

Ryan Woods
Fires! #1, 2004
oil, acrylic, graphite, shellac, roofing tar and mixed media on canvas
62 x 41-1/2 inches

Fires! #2, 2004
oil, acrylic, graphite, shellac, roofing tar and mixed media on canvas
24 x 25-1/2 inches

Nisse, 2004
oil, acrylic, graphite, shellac, roofing tar and mixed media on canvas
36 x 37-1/2 inches